

She ne used no suche knakkes smale.
WAT herfor that I telle my tale?
Right on this same, as I have seyde,
Was hoolly al my love leyde;
For certes, she was, that swete wyf,
My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf,
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my blisse,
My worldes welfare and my lisse,
And I hirs hooly, everydel.

Your Lord, quod I, I trowe yow wel!
Hardely, your love was wel beset,
I not how ye mighte have do bet.
Bet? ne no wight so wel! quod he.
I trowe hit, sir, quod I, parde!
Nay, leve hit wel! Sir, so do I;
I leve yow wel, that trewely
Yow thoghte, that she was the beste,
And to beholde the alderfaireste,
Who so had lokyd with your eyen.

WIT myn? nay, alle that hir seyen
Seyde, and sworn hit was so.
And though they ne hadde, I wolde tho
Have loved best my lady fre,
Thogh I had had al the beautee
That ever had Alcippades,
And al the strengthe of Ercules,
And therto had the worthinesse
Of Alisaundre, and al the richesse
That ever was in Babiloyne,
In Cartage, or in Macedoyne,
Or in Rome, or in Ninive;
And therto also hardy be
As was Ector, so have I joye,
That Achilles slow at Troye,
And therfor was he slayn also
In a temple, for bothe two
Were slayn, he and Antilogus,
And so seyth Dares frigus,
For love of hir Polixena,
Or ben as wys as Minerva,
I wolde ever, withoute drede,
Have loved hir, for I moste nede!
Nede! nay, I gabbe now,
Noght Nede, and I wol telle how,
For of good wille myn herte hit wolde,
And eek to love hir I was holde
As for the fairest and the beste.

She was as good, so have I reste,
As ever was Penelope of Grece,
Or as the noble wyf Lucrece,
That was the beste, he telleth thus,
The Romain Cytus Livius,
She was as good, and nothing lyke,
Thogh hir stories be autentyke;
Algate she was as trewe as she.

WAT herfor that I telle thee
Whan I first my lady sey?
I was right yong, the sooth to sey,
And ful gret need I hadde to lerne;
Whan my herte wolde yerne
To love, it was a greet emprise,
But as my wit coude best suffyse,
After my yonge childly wit,

Withoute drede, I besette hit
To love hir in my beste wyse,
To do hir worship and servyse
That I tho coude, by my trouthe,
Withoute feynyn outhir slouth;
For wonder fayn I wolde hir sec.
So mochel hit amended me,
That, whan I saw hir first amorwe,
I was warished of al my sorwe
Of al day after, til hit were eve;
Me thoghte nothing mighte me greve,
Were my sorwes never so smerte.
And yet she sit so in myn herte,
That, by my trouthe, I nolde noght,
For al this worlde, out of my thought
Leve my lady; no, trewely!

WAT, by my trouthe, sir, quod I,
Me thinketh ye have such a chaunce
As shrift withoute repentance.
REPENTANCE! nay fy, quod he;
Shulde I now repent me
To love? nay, certes, than were I wel
Wers than was Achitofel,
Or Anthenor, so have I joye,
The traytour that betrayned Troye,
Or the false Genelon,
He that purchased the treson
Of Rowland and of Oliver.

Nay, why! I am alyve here
I nil foryet hir nevermo.
WAT, goode sir, quod I right tho,
Ye han wel told me herbefore.
It is no need reherse hit more
How ye sawe hir first, and where;
But wolde ye telle me the manere,
To hir which was your firste speche,
Therof I wolde yow besече,
And how she knewe first your thoght,
Whether ye loved hir or noght,
And telleth me eek what ye have lore;
I herde yow telle herbefore.

E, seyde he, thou nost what thou menest;
I have lost more than thou weneest.
What los is that, sir? quod I tho;
Nil she not love yow? is hit so?
Or have ye oght ydoon amis,
That she hath left yow? is hit this?
For Goddes love, tel me al.
BEFORE God, quod he, and I shal.
I saye right as I have seyde,
On hir was al my love leyde;
And yet she niste hit never a del
Noght longe tyme, leve hit wel.
For be right siker, I durste noght
For al this worlde telle hir my thought,
Ne I wolde have wratthed hir, trewely,
For wostow why? she was lady
Of the body; she had the herte,
And who hath that, may not asterte.

WAT, for to kepe me fro ydelnesse,
Trewely I did my businesse
To make songes, as I best coude,
And ofte tyme I song hem loude;
And made songes a gret del,
Althogh I coude not make so wel
Songes, ne knowe the art al,
As coude I amekes sone Tubal,
That fond out first the art of songe;
For, as his brothers hamers ronge
Upon his anvelt up and down,
Therof he took the firste soun;
But Grekes seyn, Dictagoras,
That he the firste finder was
Of the art; Aurora telleth so,
But therof no fors, of hem two.
Algate songes thus I made
Of my feling, myn herte to glade;
And lo! this was the altherfirste,
I not wher that hit were the werste.

WORD, hit maketh myn herte light,
Whan I thinke on that swete wight
That is so semely on to see;
And wissheth to God hit might so be,
That she wolde holde me for hir knight,
My lady, that is so fair and bright!
WAT have I told thee, sooth to saye,
My firste song. Upon a daye
I bethoghte me what wo
And sorwe that I suffred tho
For hir, and yet she wiste hit noght,
Ne telle hir durste I nat my thought.
Alas! thoghte I, I can no reed;
And, but I telle hir, I nam but deed;
And if I telle hir, to seye sooth,
I am adred she wol be wrooth;
Alas! what shal I thanne do?

In this debat I was so wo,
Me thoghte myn herte braste atweyn!
So atte laste, soth to seyn,
I me bethoghte that nature
Ne formed never in creature
So moche beaute, trewely,
And bounte, withouten mercy.
In hope of that, my tale I tolde
With sorwe, as that I never sholde,
For nedes; and, maugree my heed,
I moste have told hir or be deed.
I not wel how that I began,
Ful evel reherseen hit I can;
And eek, as helpe me God withal,
I trowe hit was in the dismal,
That was the ten woundes of Egipte;
For many a word I over/skippte
In my tale, for pure fere
Lest my wordes mis/set were.
With sorweful herte, and woundes dede,
Softe and quaking for pure drede
And shame, and stinting in my tale
For ferde, and myn hewe al pale,
Ful ofte I wex bothe pale and reed;
Bowyn to hir, I heng the heed;
I durste nat ones loke hir on,
For wit, manere, and al was gon.
I seyde Mercy! and no more;
Hit nas no game, hit sat me sore.

So atte laste, sooth to seyn,
Whan that myn herte was come ageyn,
To telle shortly al my speche,
With hool herte I gan hir besече
That she wolde be my lady swete;
And swor, and gan hir hertely hete
Ever to be stedfast and trewe,
And love hir alwey freshly newe,
And never other lady have,
And al hir worship for to save
As I best coude; I swor hir this:
For youres is al that ever ther is
For evermore, myn herte swete!
And never false yow, but I mete,
I nil, as wis God helpe me so!
WAT whan I had my tale ydo,
God wot, she accounted nat a stree
Of al my tale, so thoghte me.
To telle shortly as hit is,
Trewely hir answer, hit was this;
I can not now wel counterfete
Hir wordes, but this was the grette
Of hir answer; she sayde, Nay
Alouterly. Alas! that day
The sorwe I suffred, and the wo!
That trewely Cassandra, that so
Bewayled the destruccioun
Of Troye and of Ilioun,
Had never swich sorwe as I tho.
I durste no more say therto
For pure fere, but stal away;
And thus I lived ful many a day:
That trewely, I hadde no need
Ferther than my beddes heed
Never a day to seche sorwe;
I fond hit redy every morwe,
Forwhy I loved hir in no gere.

So hit befel, another yere,
I thoughte ones I wolde fonde
To do hir knowe and understonde
My wo; and she wel understood
That I ne wilned thing but good,
And worship, and to kepe hir name
Over al thing, and drede hir shame,
And was so besy hir to serve;
And pite were I shulde sterve,
Sith that I wilned noon harm, ywis.
So whan my lady knewe al this,
My lady yaf me al hoolly
The noble yift of hir mercy,
Saying hir worship, by al weyes;
Dredles, I mene noon other weyes.
And therwith she yaf me a ring;
I trowe hit was the firste thing;
But if myn herte was ywaxe
Glad, that is no need to axe!
As helpe me God, I was as blyve,
Reysed, as fro dethe to lyve,
Of alle happes the alderbeste,
The gladdest and the moste at reste.
For trewely, that swete wight,
Whan I had wrong and she the right,
She wolde alwey so goodely